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Senate

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program Reform

Mr. President, I rise today to urge our colleagues in the Senate to instruct the conferees to the budget reconciliation bill to reject the House provisions dealing with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF, Program.

Like several of our colleagues, I have a long history of working to improve our Nation's welfare policies to, first of all, make them more effective for States, but also more effective for families.

When I was privileged to serve as Governor of the State of Delaware, I also served, at the same time, as cochairman of the National Governors Association's Welfare Reform Task Force, along with then-Governor John Engler, and played a lead role in helping to craft welfare reform legislation for Delaware and for our Nation.

As Senator, I have pushed, for the past 3 years, for welfare reauthorization legislation that emphasizes work while also providing help to welfare participants with respect to childcare and educational opportunities.

Because of my extensive involvement with welfare reform for more than a dozen years and my belief that the program can work for both States and families, I am troubled that the House of Representatives has chosen to include its welfare reauthorization bill in the budget reconciliation package. Doing so gives the Senate no opportunity to debate the needed changes in this important program.

The TANF provisions included by the House would reauthorize and make significant policy changes to our Nation's welfare program. Those changes include far more

stringent work requirements than under current law while failing to provide sufficient childcare funding or other work supports to help participants meet those new requirements. The House bill would dramatically increase requirements on States without giving them additional resources. And the House language would make it more difficult for TANF recipients to make the successful leap from welfare to work.

The budget reconciliation process is not the right place to reauthorize our country's welfare program. Instead, we should take the opportunity to reauthorize welfare through the regular legislative process, using the bipartisan bill reported out of the Senate Finance Committee as our guide.

Earlier this year, you may recall, the Senate Finance Committee reported out a welfare reform bill--it is called the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, lovingly known as the PRIDE Act--on a bipartisan basis. This legislation would make commonsense changes and reauthorize the welfare reform program for the next 5 years. The measure would also provide long overdue stability to States and beneficiaries who have been waiting since 2002 for us to provide long-term reauthorization, a path forward.

I would like to commend this afternoon Chairman *Grassley* and Ranking Member *Baucus*, their Finance Committee colleagues, and their staff for their hard work in crafting the bipartisan PRIDE Act. That legislation is a testament to their dedication and their commitment to enabling Americans to move off welfare and, most importantly, be better off. That committee was able to find consensus on issues that can be both complex and, at times, controversial.

The PRIDE bill can and should be taken up by the full Senate and debated on the Senate floor early next year. This is not a debate that should consume weeks but, rather, a debate that should consume at most a few days. I pledge today to work closely with my colleagues on our side and the

Republican side of the aisle to ensure that the bill does not get bogged down in the Senate and that we move it along.

A full debate, though, on the issues would give the Senate, not just a few Senate conferees to a reconciliation bill, the opportunity to have a real discussion about the future of welfare and what policies we should accept or reject during reauthorization. That is what we need to do. And I believe it need not take weeks to develop a consensus and pass a bipartisan bill by a wide margin.

In my view, the House welfare reform bill, called the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2005, is, unfortunately, decidedly partisan. The bill was reported out of both subcommittee and committee by party-line votes and was then dropped wholesale into the budget reconciliation bill.

While I am opposed to the inclusion of the House TANF provisions in the reconciliation bill, I encourage my Senate colleagues to oppose including it for a number of other reasons as well.

I fear that the House's inclusion of a welfare reauthorization bill in a budget reconciliation bill sets up two likely possibilities: No. 1, that the conferees will simply recede to the House TANF provisions; or, No. 2, differences between the House TANF provisions and the Senate PRIDE bill will have to be worked out during a hurried conference committee, in which a few conferees will be faced with tough choices on an incredible array of other issues. Neither scenario is acceptable. Welfare will likely be overshadowed in

this context and is not likely to get much thoughtful review.

The work-first approach to welfare reform has enabled States to reduce caseloads dramatically over the last decade or so, while helping members of low-income families to move into jobs and toward financial self-sufficiency. We should build on these successes, not jeopardize them. By giving welfare the proper legislative consideration in both the House and the Senate, we can do just that.

The House TANF provisions differ greatly from the Senate's, and I believe a number of the House provisions are flat out unacceptable. The House bill would dramatically increase, for example, the number of hours that welfare recipients must work. You may recall, under current law, welfare recipients must work an average of 30 hours per week. However, under current law, mothers with young children under the age of 6 must now work at least 20 hours per week. The House bill, by comparison, requires that all welfare recipients--if you have a child a week old or a month old or a year old--even mothers with young children must work 40 hours per week. That is a doubling of the required hours for single parents with young children.

I have been supportive of increased work requirements in the past, but the House bill increases work hours while failing to provide adequate funding for badly needed childcare.

My friends, we can do better than that. To me, it is just basic logic, basic common sense that in order to move parents off welfare into work, we have to

give them access to decent childcare. The House bill provides only \$100 million per year in additional childcare funding to meet a doubling of work hours. Spread out over 50 States, that does not come close to meeting the needs of families. In fact, over 5 years, this level of funding is \$500 million less than what has been included in previous House-passed bills, and \$5.5 billion less than what the Senate would provide. What is more, according to the Congressional Budget Office, it is \$4.3 billion less than what is needed to keep pace with inflation and almost \$8 billion less than the amount needed to offset increased demand for childcare caused by the increased work requirements.

Again, when I was privileged to serve as Governor of my little State, I saw firsthand that parents cannot move to work successfully if they do not have an answer to this question: Who is going to take care of my children and how will I pay for it?

If we want to help parents find jobs--and I know we do--we need to help them secure childcare. It is just that simple.

In addition to what I feel are inadequate provisions surrounding work and childcare, the House bill also limits the ability of welfare recipients to participate in educational activities such as vocational education, allowing participants to participate in that activity for only 3 months in a 2-year period instead of the current 12 months.

The Senate bill, on the other hand, continues to allow 12 months of vocational education and also establishes something called a Parents as Scholars Program, which allows welfare

recipients to go on to higher education, not forever but for at least a limited period of time.

In my view, the House bill is not friendly to States either. It asks States to make dramatic changes to their programs. Yet it gives them no additional funding to accomplish those changes and little time to meet those requirements before they would be subject to harsh penalties. The Senate bill, on the other hand, gives States time to meet new requirements. If States make improvements but for some reason are not able to immediately ramp up to the strenuous new targets, penalties will be temporarily waived--not permanently, temporarily. Perhaps some of my Senate colleagues on the other side of the aisle could find common ground with the House provisions. Perhaps some believe we could improve upon the House provisions in conference to come up with something that is more workable.

I argue, however, that no matter what my colleagues think about the House proposal, we can all agree that the Senate should have the chance to consider welfare reauthorization under regular order, and soon. If we are allowed to debate welfare reform in this

body, I am confident we could come up with a bipartisan agreement that truly advances our shared goal of making work pay more than welfare.

The motion I will offer tomorrow would urge conferees to give the Senate a chance to do just that, by rejecting provisions related to the reauthorization of TANF. Instead, the motion I will offer would urge that the Congress enact freestanding legislation that builds on the bipartisan Senate Finance Committee PRIDE bill.

I cannot emphasize enough that the Senate bill was reported out of the Finance Committee on a bipartisan basis. The House bill, on the other hand, has consistently enjoyed the support of only one party. Further, welfare reform should not be considered in the whirlwind of budget reconciliation. Reform should be based on sound policy, and we should seek to find bipartisan consensus on this most important issue, something I am confident we can do.

Tomorrow, when the motion to instruct is offered, I urge and invite my colleagues, both Democratic and Republican, to support it.